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Assembly California Legislature

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June 10, 2009

To: Members of the California Legislature

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Governor Schwarzenegger's proposal to eliminate the Office of AIDS and many of the services it provides.

The AIDS epidemic has not ended. Each year, more than 50,000 people are diagnosed with HIV in the United States. California is only second to New York in the number of residents living with HIV. My district, the City and County of San Francisco, is home to a very substantial percentage of those Californians with the disease. Despite the best efforts of scientists around the world there is no cure or vaccine to prevent HIV. The best treatments currently available come with significant, debilitating side-effects and aren't effective for all patients.

Patients who contract HIV but have access to modern medicine can often go on to live long and productive lives. However, without access to medical care that includes access to antiretroviral therapy, most patients die from AIDS within a year.

The Governor's proposed cuts would reduce the ability of people living with HIV to access medical care and could kill most of the more than 150,000 HIV-positive Californians. Because many HIV/AIDS patients are unable to obtain adequate health insurance coverage because of the extraordinary costs of treating the disease, the lives of many of those people living with HIV in California rely on state assistance through the Office of AIDS and Medi-Cal for drug assistance and medical treatment costs.

Significant cuts to the state Office of AIDS would be tantamount to signing the death warrants of 35,000 AIDS patients who rely on the AIDS Drug Assistance Program for life extending drugs. Thousands more subsist on Medi-Cal. Besides administering the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), the Office of AIDS coordinates many of the AIDS prevention and testing programs in the state. These programs have successfully slowed the infection rates, improved survival rates and prevented hundreds of thousand of men and women from suffering an AIDS related death.

While I understand that this state is facing the greatest economic crisis it has seen since the Great Depression or before, it is unacceptable to eliminate critical, life-saving programs which would disproportionately affect minorities.

The current proposal to cut \$55.5 million General Fund (GF) dollars in Fiscal Year (FY) 2009-10 and \$58.9 million GF in FY 2010-11, as well as \$24.6 million GF in HIV prevention and education services would devastate life saving programs that service low-income Californians living with and at risk for HIV/AIDS, including many members of the gay and African-American communities who are disproportionately impacted by the disease.

By the Governor's estimate, the elimination of the HIV/AIDS services from the budget would only help save \$150 million in the next 2 years – a measly sum of money when compared to the number of lives it saves.

I will not support any budget proposal that would hasten the preventable deaths of so many people and I urge reconsideration of these draconian cuts.

Sincerely,



Tom Ammiano

Assemblymember, 13th District

CC:

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

Assembly Speaker Karen Bass

Assembly Minority Leader Sam Blakeslee

Senate President Pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg

Senate Minority Floor Leader Dennis Hollingsworth

California Legislative Budget Conference Committee Conferees